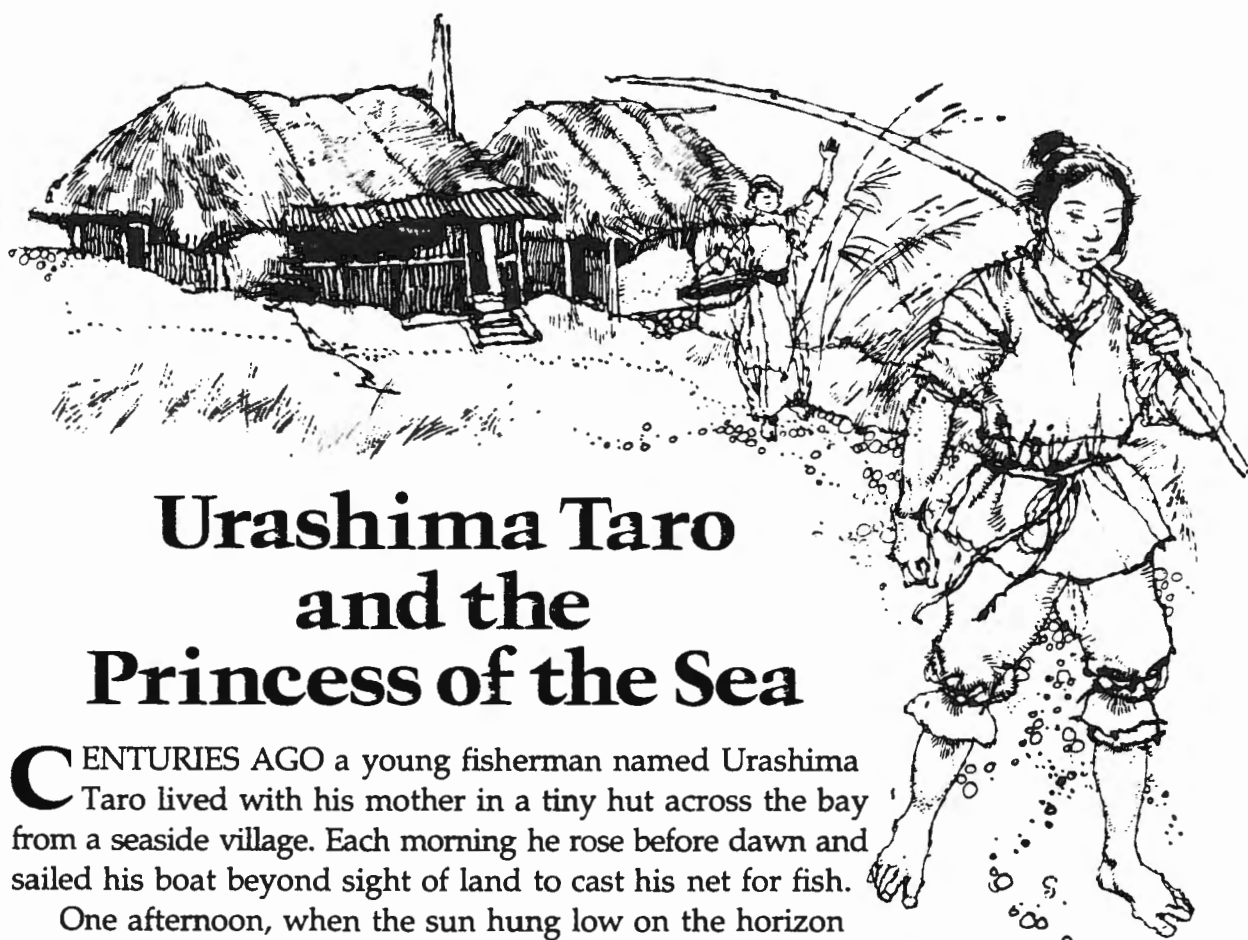


Cricket

The magazine for children





Urashima Taro and the Princess of the Sea

CENTURIES AGO a young fisherman named Urashima Taro lived with his mother in a tiny hut across the bay from a seaside village. Each morning he rose before dawn and sailed his boat beyond sight of land to cast his net for fish.

One afternoon, when the sun hung low on the horizon and the surface of the water resembled the blue glaze of a porcelain bowl, Urashima Taro cast his net. All day it had come up empty, but this time he felt something in it. Urashima Taro pulled with all his strength. Out of the sea came an enormous turtle. This pleased the youth no end, for turtle shell was extremely valuable and one this size would bring a handsome price.

As he bent to lift the turtle into the boat, it spoke his name. "Urashima Taro, have pity on me. Please let me go."

Urashima Taro realized this was no ordinary turtle. He answered, "Great Turtle, forgive me. I cannot free you. I have caught nothing all day, and if I return empty-handed, my mother and I will go hungry."

PORCELAIN IS A FINE,
DELICATE CHINA. SAY
IT: POR-SHUN-LIN.



**A TALE
FROM
JAPAN**

29

Adapted by Eric A. Kimmel

© 1992 by Eric A. Kimmel

But the creature sighed so pitifully and looked with such longing at the open sea that Urashima Taro relented. As he released the turtle, it said to him, "You will not suffer for your kindness. Cast your net again. And remember, if you are ever in danger, call on me." Then it slipped out of sight beneath the waves.

Urashima Taro cast his net once more. This time it came up full of fish.

That evening he told his mother about the strange encounter. She replied, "You did well to let the turtle go. I suspect it was no turtle at all but *Umi no Himesan*, the Princess of the Sea, who watches over all who venture on the ocean. She often appears in different forms."

Urashima Taro pondered his mother's words. And from then on he watched for the turtle while he was fishing. But it never appeared again.

One day when Urashima Taro was casting his net, a typhoon arose. Howling winds splintered the mast, and waves battered the boat to pieces. Urashima Taro called out to the gods to save him. Then he remembered the turtle.

"O Great Turtle!" he cried as the sea reached out for him. "Have pity on me!"

At once Urashima Taro felt himself lifted above the waves on the turtle's knobby shell.

"You saved my life," the grateful fisherman murmured, clinging to the turtle's back.

"Because you once spared mine." Then the turtle added, "And I have one more favor to grant you. Would you like to visit the palace of *Umi no Himesan*? It is not far."

"Oh yes, I would like to see it very much," Urashima Taro replied. "But how can I go there?"

"Leave that to me. Hold on."

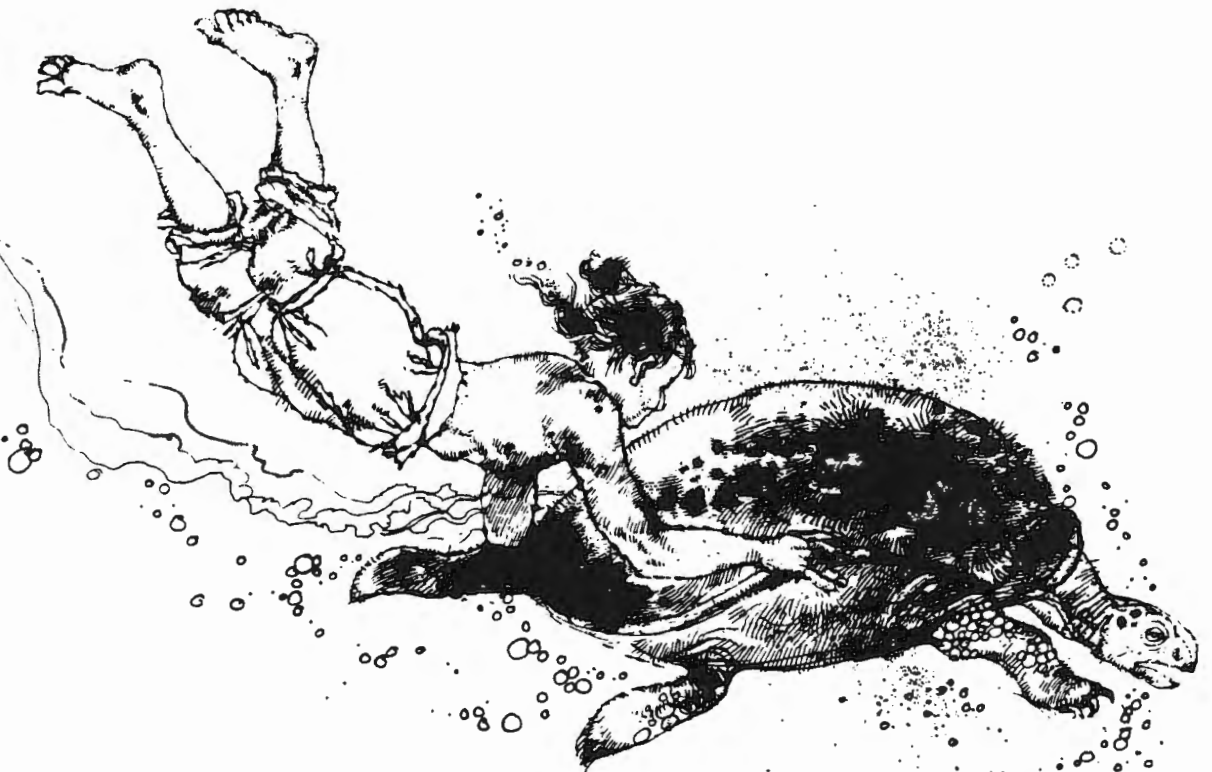
Urashima Taro held tight to the turtle as it dived deep beneath the waves. The sea divided to make a wide path.

PANPERED MEANS
THOUGHT DEEPLY
ABOUT.



A TYPHOON
IS A TROPICAL
HURRICANE.
SAY IT: TY-





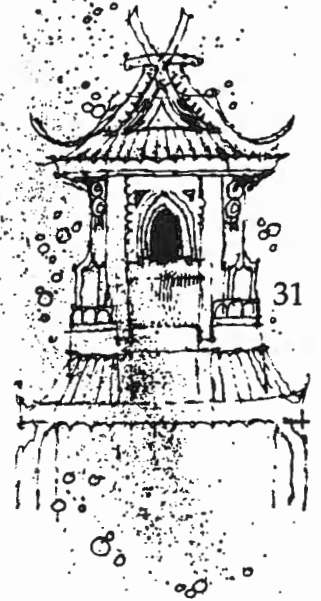
Down, down they went, until they reached the ocean floor. There Urashima Taro beheld a splendid castle with coral walls and sea green towers. Soldiers in black lacquered armor stood guard at the gate. "Wait here," the turtle said. "I will go prepare the way."

After a while the soldiers opened the gate. They led Urashima Taro through a series of stately rooms until they arrived at a vast audience chamber with four great doors. Courtiers in shimmering gowns drifted among the coral columns. Then someone called out, "Urashima Taro."

Looking up, the fisherman saw a young woman seated on a dragon throne. Her dark hair floated round her head like a perfumed cloud. "Urashima Taro, do you not know me? I am your old friend the turtle. I am also known as *Umi no Himesan*, the Princess of the Sea."

Urashima Taro dropped to his knees and pressed his forehead against the floor.

"There is no need to bow. Come sit beside me."



LACQUERED MEANS
PROTECTED WITH A HARD,
SHINY VARNISH. SAY IT:
LAK-ERD.





A SUMPTUOUS ARRAY
IS A MAGNIFICENT,
RICH DISPLAY!

The courtiers led Urashima Taro to the dragon throne. The Princess of the Sea clapped her hands. "Our guest has arrived. Let the banquet begin."

A sumptuous array of delicacies at once appeared. Urashima Taro sampled each one. He had no idea what he was eating, but every morsel was exactly to his taste.

When the banquet ended, the Princess of the Sea turned to Urashima Taro. "This castle is known as *Shiki no Miya*, the Palace of the Seasons. Behold!"

The first of the four great doors opened. Urashima Taro felt the sting of sleet as an icy wind whipped through the hall. Looking through the door, he recognized the rocky coast near his home. Towering waves crashed against the cliffs, and trees bent under the weight of snow.

The Princess of the Sea shivered. She waved her fan. The second door opened.

Urashima Taro beheld the same coast again, this time as it might appear in spring. Flocks of seabirds in brilliant plumage wheeled above the rocks. Blue, purple, and yellow mats of wildflowers blanketed the open spaces along the cliffs.

The princess sighed with pleasure. She gestured again, and the third door opened. Summer found the bay alive with the white sails of fishing boats. The radiant sun hung high overhead, and the azure sky blended into the ocean's deep blue along the endless horizon.

"How quickly it passes," the princess murmured sadly. The last door opened. Urashima Taro saw an empty stretch of beach. The flowers and birds were gone. Only a few boats dotted the bay. Standing by the water's edge, an old woman leaned heavily on her cane. Urashima Taro recognized his mother. He had stayed too long in the Palace of the Seasons. His mother must think he had been lost at sea.

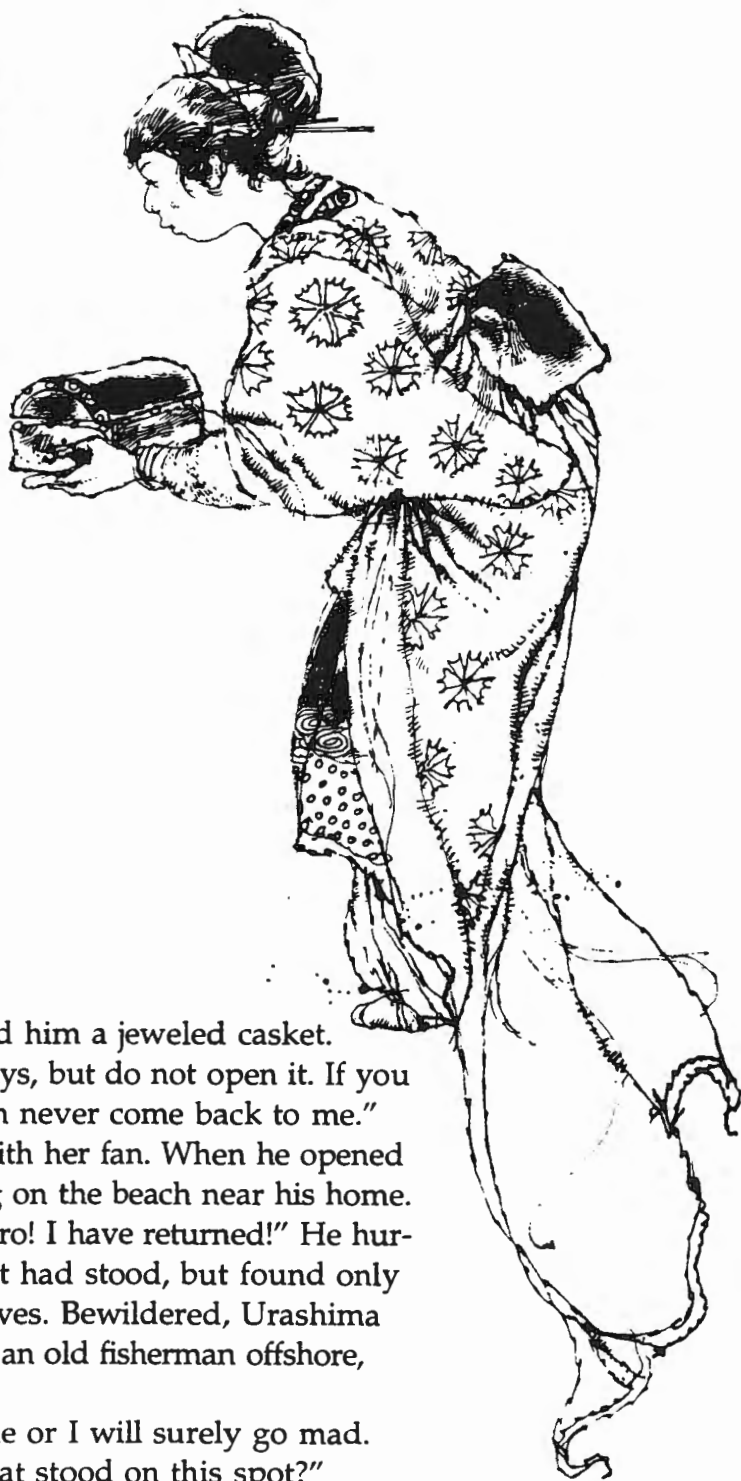
"I must return home," Urashima Taro told the princess.

"Not yet," she pleaded. "I have much more to show you."

"I must go now," he insisted.

AZURE IS
SKY BLUE.
SAY IT:
AZH - FR!





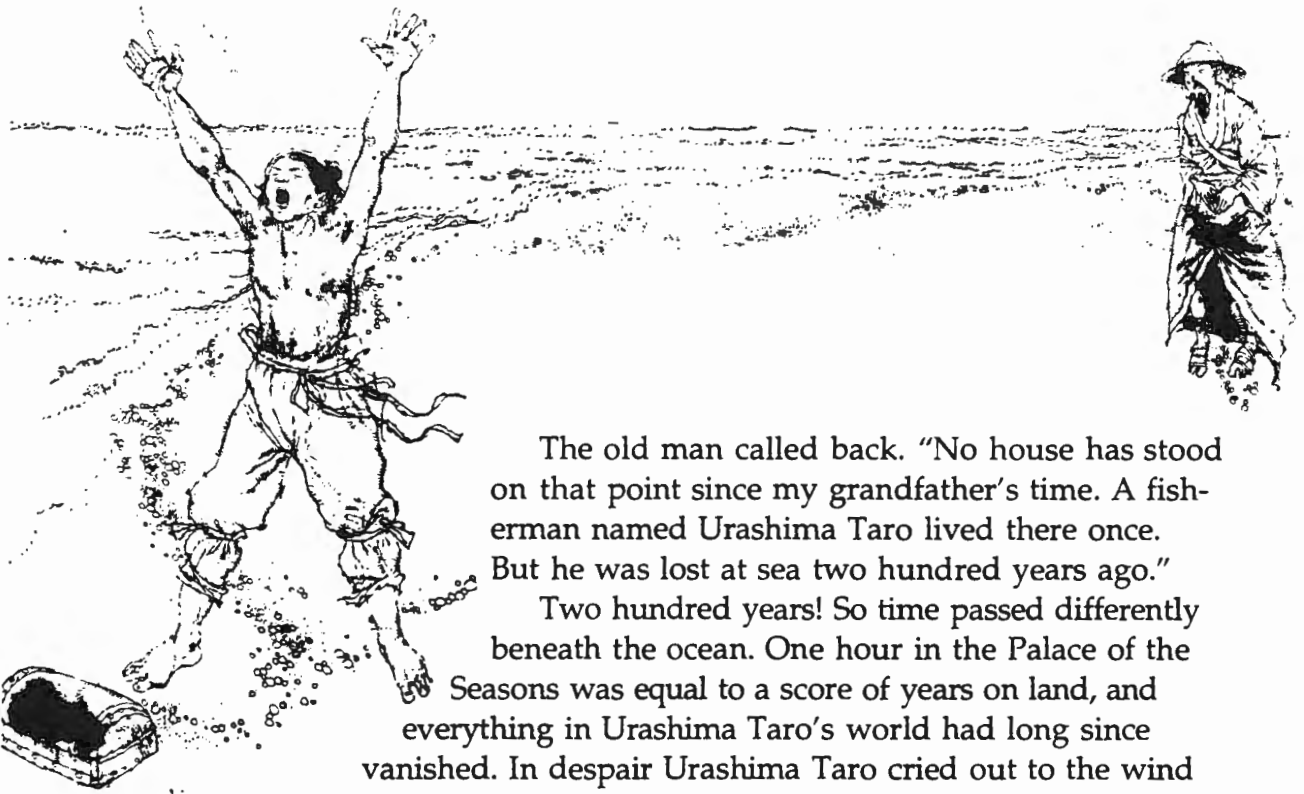
"Then take this." She handed him a jeweled casket.
"Keep this casket with you always, but do not open it. If you open it, Urashima Taro, you can never come back to me."
The princess covered his eyes with her fan. When he opened them, he found himself standing on the beach near his home.

"Mother, it is I, Urashima Taro! I have returned!" He hurried to the place where their hut had stood, but found only barren rocks washed by the waves. Bewildered, Urashima Taro glanced out to sea. He saw an old fisherman offshore, pulling crab pots into his boat.

"Old man, you must help me or I will surely go mad. What happened to the house that stood on this spot?"

A CASKET, HERE,
IS A SMALL BOX
OR CHEST.





The old man called back. "No house has stood on that point since my grandfather's time. A fisherman named Urashima Taro lived there once. But he was lost at sea two hundred years ago."

Two hundred years! So time passed differently beneath the ocean. One hour in the Palace of the Seasons was equal to a score of years on land, and everything in Urashima Taro's world had long since vanished. In despair Urashima Taro cried out to the wind and waves. Surely the Princess of the Sea would not abandon him. Then he remembered the jeweled casket. It must contain an answer.

Ignoring the princess's warning, he tore the casket open. It was empty . . . or perhaps there was something in it after all, something he could not see. For all at once the weight of two hundred years fell upon him. His limbs twisted and shrank, and his skin grew leathery. His mouth became a horny beak and his back a knobbed shell. Urashima Taro had become a sea turtle. The great creature that was once a fisherman dragged itself down to the shore's edge and disappeared beneath the waters of the bay.

The story ends here. No one knows what became of Urashima Taro. But whenever Japanese fishermen catch sight of a great turtle at sea, they call out, "Good luck, Urashima Taro! May you find your princess one day and the wide path that leads to the Palace of the Seasons." 🐢

OH MY! A SCORE
MEANS TWENTY!

